Compressing Pictures in PowerPoint (Apr 08)
By Geetesh Bajaj

The decline in the prices of digital cameras is directly related to the bloating file sizes of PowerPoint files. If you don't believe me, just insert a few ten megapixel photos inside a PowerPoint presentation and see what happens to the file size. The poor presentation is probably already on its way to the bloat heavens. And the person to whom you send this presentation by email is on his way to download hell! OK – this behavior may no longer happen within the new PowerPoint 2007, but as I'll explain later in this article, the compression settings in 2007 are hardly optimized enough.

Microsoft realized that compression was a large issue many years ago and built picture compression capabilities inside PowerPoint – right from PowerPoint 2002 (XP) onwards. Unfortunately (and you knew this was going to come in somewhere), they placed the compression options so well hidden inside the interface that even people who were using PowerPoint for years failed to discover the feature. And they did rectify this in the new PowerPoint 2007, although they then created the new problem of automatic compression. In this article, we will explore all the compression info that you need to know as a PowerPoint user.

If you are using any version earlier than PowerPoint 2002, you will still benefit from this article since I'll explore third-party compression options. Or maybe you'll end up justifying the cost of an upgrade to the current PowerPoint version!

Checking File Sizes

Whichever version of PowerPoint you use, try this quick exercise:

1. First of all, you need a bloated presentation to start with. That's easy – as I already suggested, insert a few (maybe a dozen) megapixel photos inside your PowerPoint presentation. Resize the photos to be no larger than the slide area. Save the file.

2. Then check the size by summoning the Properties dialog box. PowerPoint 2007 users can choose Office Button | Prepare | Properties. This brings up the Document Properties pane, and you need to again choose Document Properties | Advanced Properties as shown in Figure 1.
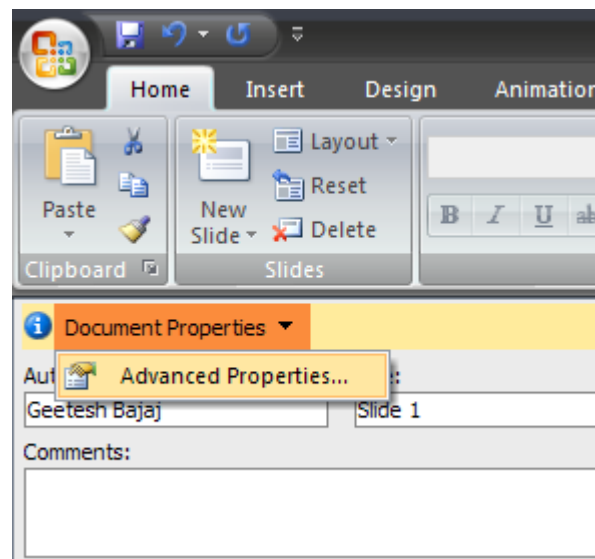

Figure 1: Select Advanced Properties

Users of older PowerPoint versions need to just choose File | Properties to get the same dialog box!

3. In this dialog box, choose the General tab as shown in Figure 2 – this tab will provide more info about the file size – make a note of the file size.
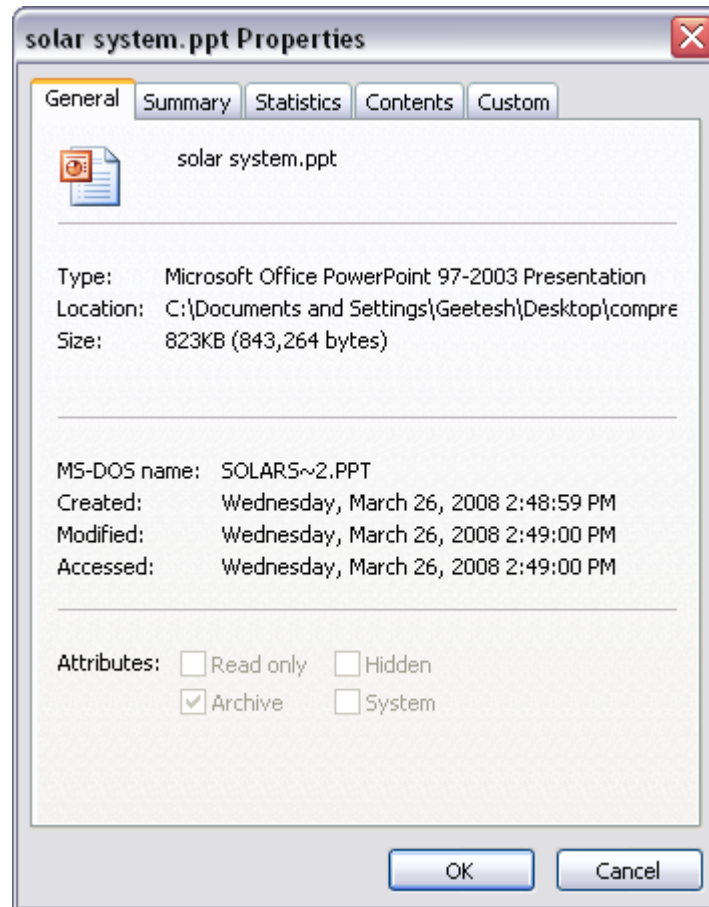

Figure 2: Make a note of the file size

Putting the Squeeze

Now, let's put those pictures on an inch-loss program. In PowerPoint parlance, this means compressing the picture sizes to trim off the excess fat in the presentation. Follow these steps to compress the pictures depending upon your version of PowerPoint:

PowerPoint 2007

1. With your active presentation open, save it by choosing Office Button | Save so that any changes you made are saved.

2. Now double-click on any picture on any slide to activate the Picture Tools Format tab on the Ribbon.

3. Within this new tab, click the Compress Pictures option as shown in Figure 3.
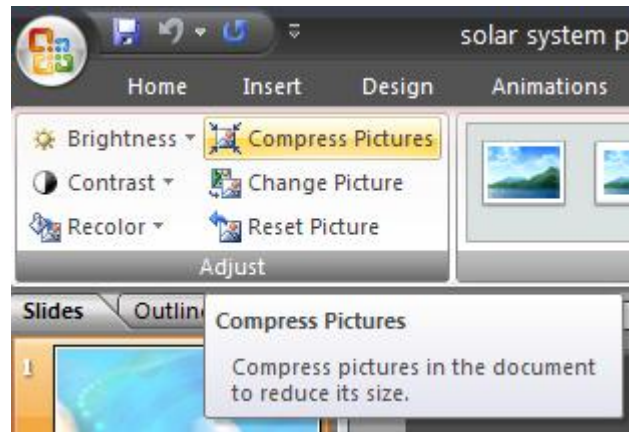
Figure 3: Compress pictures

4. This brings up the Compress Pictures box that you can see in Figure 4 – make sure that the Apply to selected pictures only option is deselected, and click Options button.
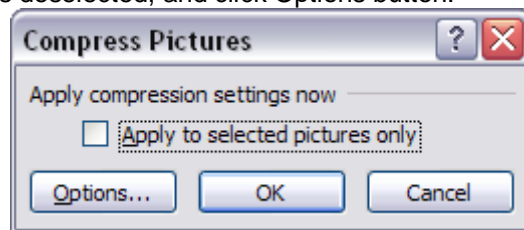

Figure 4: Compress pictures

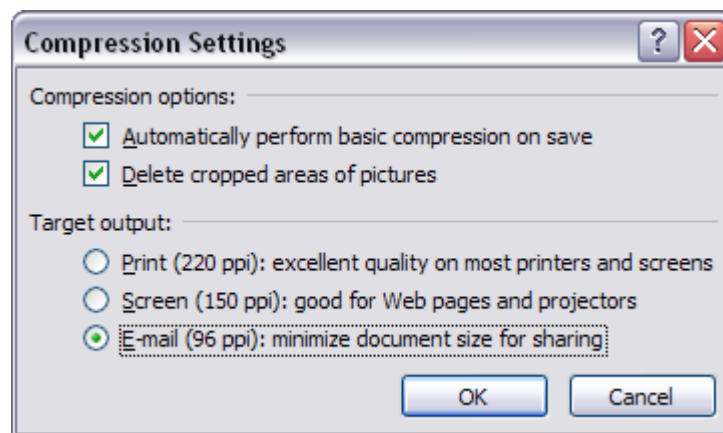5. This summons the Compression Settings dialog box that you can see in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Compression Settings

6. Choose your compression settings as required. You could leave the Automatically Perform Basic Compression on Save and the Delete Cropped Areas of Pictures options selected, but you'll want to deselect the former option if you don't want automatic compression active.

Also, change your Target output to E-mail (96 ppi) – this works best unless you need to print your slides to high res printers.

7. Click OK twice in successive dialog boxes to get back to PowerPoint. If your computer feels sluggish at this time, that's because PowerPoint is working hard to apply the compression settings you just chose.

8. Save your presentation (or save it as a new file) – and then compare file sizes again to ascertain if compression helped in reducing the file size.

PowerPoint 2002 and 2003

1. With your active presentation open, save it by File | Save so that any changes you made are saved.

2. Select any one picture in your presentation.

3. Right-click the picture and choose Format Picture from the resultant fly-out menu. This will open the Format Picture dialog box with six tabs that you can see in Figure 6.
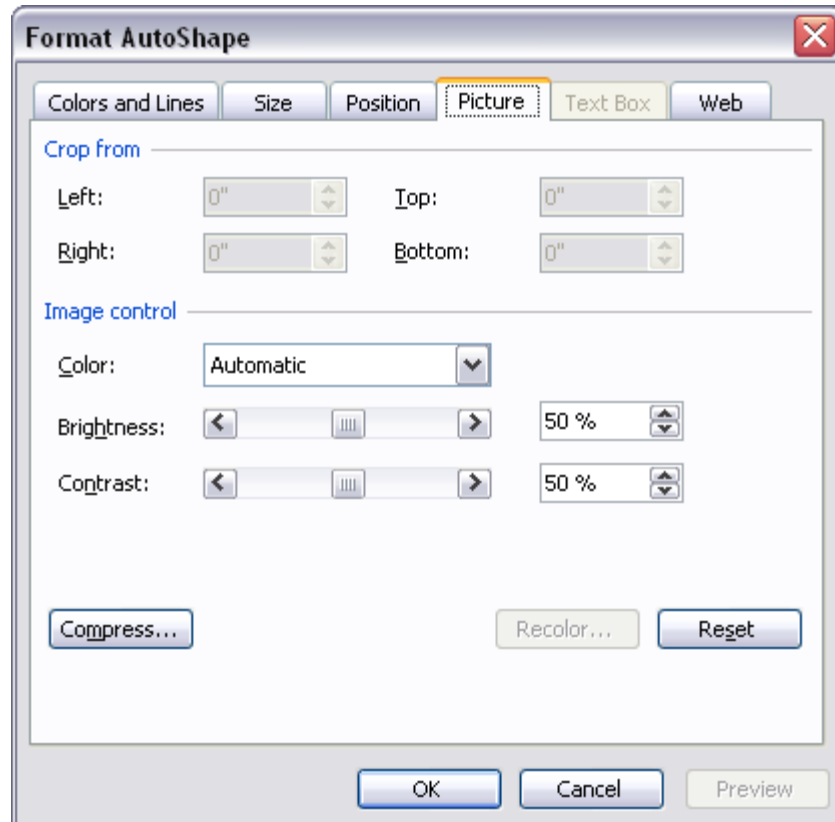

Figure 6: Picture tab in the Format Picture dialog box

4. Choose the Picture tab and click the Compress button to open the Compress Pictures dialog box that you can see in Figure 7.
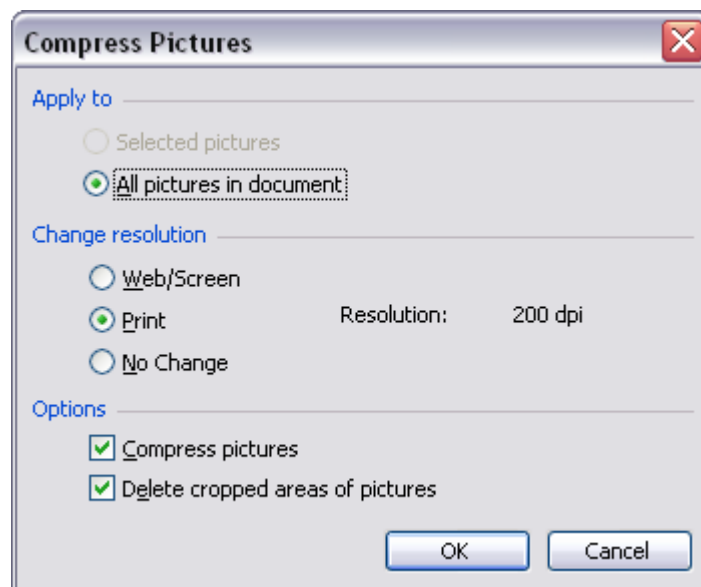

Figure 7: Compression Pictures

5. Change the Resolution to Web/Screen and opt to Apply to All pictures in document. Also leave the options for Compress pictures and Delete cropped areas of pictures checked.

6. Click OK and then Apply in the successive dialog box. Ignore any warnings. This will get you back to the Format Picture dialog box. If your computer feels sluggish at this time, that's because PowerPoint is working hard to apply the compression settings you just chose.

7. Click OK again to dismiss the Format Picture dialog box. Now save your presentation.

8. Make a trip again to the Properties dialog box and check the new file size against the earlier file size, as shown in Figure 8. Now only if reducing waist sizes was this easy!
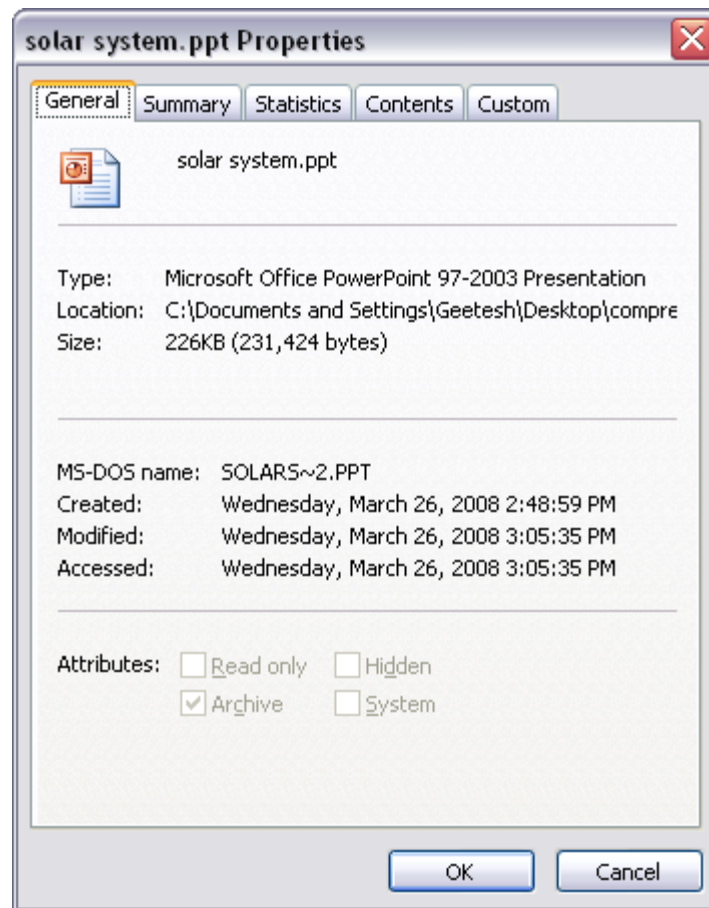

Figure 8: Check Properties again to compare file sizes

Using Third Party Compression/Optimization Programs

There are plenty of third party programs that provide compression options in PowerPoint. Many of these also work with Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel files to provide a full suite of optimization options across Microsoft Office programs.
Here's a list of some of these programs, along with links to their full reviews on Indezine.com:

* Neuxpower NXPowerLite is among the most well known programs in this category – their latest version works with Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, and is also compatible with Office 2007.
http://www.indezine.com/products/powerpoint/addin/nxpowerlite3.html

* PPTminimizer is from Balesio, a German company that also creates several other products such as TurboDemo. PPTminimizer can also search for PowerPoint and other Office file formats on your computer and apply automatic compression.
http://www.indezine.com/products/powerpoint/addin/pptminimizer3.html

* PowerShrink from TopByte Labs works with PowerPoint files, and Word and Excel files from Office 2007. PowerShrink can also extract all images from Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files with just one click.
http://www.indezine.com/products/powerpoint/addin/powershrink2007.html

* PPTshare File Compressor optimizes and saves your PowerPoint presentation to a new file so that the original PowerPoint file is left unaltered. PPTshare compresses the graphics and embedded documents contained in the presentation – the optimized presentation can be then sent through e-mail with a single click.
http://www.indezine.com/products/powerpoint/addin/filecompressor.html

Whichever third-party tool you use, do remember that most of these provide several extra features that may make it worth buying them – all of them also have trial versions so that you can actually work with them and ascertain their worthiness.

PowerPoint 2007's Automatic Compression

Although most of the time, PowerPoint 2007's automatic compression can be a good thing, it can become a problem area if you need to print to high res quality – or if you need to create digital scrapbooks or photo albums in PowerPoint.
Learn more about working with this feature at:
http://www.scrapbookpresentations.com/ideas/disableimagecompression.html

About the Author: Geetesh Bajaj is a Microsoft PowerPoint MVP. He believes presentations are a sum of elements - each element can be fascinating - with all their abstracts, concepts, and designs. Geetesh creates presentations and templates professionally.